

Sniper Recalled in Kansas Hometown As an 'Average, Not Militant' Youth

By LAWRENCE Van GELDER

In Emporia, Kan., yesterday, Mark James Robert Essex was remembered as an "average" sort of young man, whose brushes with the law prior to his death Sunday night as a suspected sniper on a New Orleans roof were no worse than a few traffic violations.

"He was average, normal, not militant — average in grades and behavior," said Robert Lodle, who was principal of Emporia Senior High School when Mr. Essex, known as Jimmy, was graduated in 1967.

"I don't think he was ever in trouble," said Moris Dell, a compositor at The Emporia Gazette, who lives a few blocks from the Essex home and knows the family.

At the Navy recruiting office in the city whose population as recorded in the 1970 census was 23,327, of whom 569 are blacks, records showed the dead man's date of birth as Aug. 12, 1949.

3 Traffic Violations

According to Aviation Ordnance Man 1st Cl. Roger E. Bafus, on duty at the recruiting station, the record of Mr. Essex's recruitment — he entered the Navy on Jan. 13, 1969 — showed that Mr. Essex had been involved in three traffic violations.

One of them, he said, was for failing to heed a stop sign, one for speeding and one for illegal passing. The record showed, the recruiter said, that Mr. Essex had entered the Navy at an advance pay grade, that of seaman apprentice rather than as seaman recruit, because he had had some college training.

At Labette Community Junior College, a two year college in Parson, Kan., with an enrollment of about 520 students, records showed that Mr. Essex had entered the Kansas State College at Pittsburg, Kan., in the autumn of 1967.

The following spring, he transferred to Labette and

completed the semester before spending the summer as a transfer student at the Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia.

Leaves College

According to a spokesman for Labette, the record showed that Essex returned to Labette in the fall of 1968 and withdrew from the college with passing grades in November, when a transcript of his record was forwarded at his request to the Navy recruiting office. In January, 1969, a final transcript was forwarded to the Navy.

The spokesman said that the record showed that Essex had been studying ac-



United Press International
Mark James Robert Essex
in a 1967 high school
year-book photograph.

counting and had grades that were about average.

In Washington, the Navy said Essex was given a general discharge for unsuitability on Feb. 10, 1970. A spokesman said this type of discharge involved "character and behavior disorders," but would not elaborate. Mr. Dell, the newspaper

compositor, said he believed Essex had worked in Emporia for a while after being discharged.

What happened afterward was still unclear yesterday.

At the newspaper office, Mr. Essex's father, who was identified on Navy records as Mark Henry O'Dell Essex, was described as a foreman for the Fanestil Packing Company in Emporia.

Carroll Schubert, federal projects coordinator for the Board of Education in Emporia, said that the dead man's mother, Nellie, who had recently completed work for a master's degree in early childhood teaching, was employed as a teacher in a year-round Head Start program.

Mr. Schubert said that Mark Essex was one of five children, three boys and two girls. Mrs. Essex, he said, was a teacher in a class of 16 children, 3- and 4-year-olds.

"She was informed of this family catastrophe this morning during her working hours," Mr. Schubert said, "and left the job upon being informed."

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Associated Press

Alex Vega, chief of the New Orleans Police Department's ballistics bureau, holding the .44-caliber rifle found on the roof of the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge, left, and the shotgun used by Louis Sirgo, deputy superintendent who was slain. Maj. Henry Morris is at right.